

# fimbulvetr

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Kurogane notices that something seems to be off with Fai. KuroFai

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Fai freezes for only a moment when they all make their way into the little cafe in this new world they've found themselves in. It's only a few seconds, only a hair's breadth of hesitation, but Kurogane notices.

The cafe is small and warm - a very welcome reprieve from the biting cold outside. It seemed to be the very essence of pleasant and comfortable, with a roaring fireplace and low-lighting from a few strategically placed lamps. A place that Fai normally would have relaxed into like a spoiled, sun-warmed cat.

They find themselves a little booth tucked against the front-wall windows with a nice view of the snow-dusted village streets outside, and Fai tucks himself into the seat near the window - a detail that Kurogane finds himself noting. Typically, the mage would have already started up a chat with some of the locals at an adjoining table - or gotten the attention of the waiter in an attempt to subtly ply them for information about the town. It had become nearly routine at this point - a pattern well-worn through time and practice over the long months traveling together.

Kurogane can tell that something is wrong, as he watches Fai's mouth curl up into a particularly tight smile, his eyes quickly darting around what seemed to be a simple, cozy little cafe. Sakura and Syaoran sit across from them, looking through the menus to decide what they want. Neither of them seem tense - Syaoran's shoulders are relaxed against the high wooden back of the booth and he grins easily when Sakura shows him something on her menu that she thinks he'll like.

Kurogane's eyes dart back to Fai, taking in the stiffness of his posture, the subtle whiteness of the skin around his knuckles as he holds his hands together atop the table - almost as if he's bracing for something.

He's just at the point of getting ready to ask about it when the waiter approaches. His apron is slightly askew, and his long, ink-dark hair is tied up in a simple bun. He offers them a cheery, polite smile, and introduces himself as Ashura.

Kurogane just barely hears the long breath Fai lets out as the waiter turns to take Syaoran's order. If he hadn't been on-edge already and focused on Fai, he definitely would have missed it.

He watches from the corner of his eye as Fai's gaze lingers on the menu for longer than strictly necessary. When he finally speaks up to make his order, his voice is still as bright as it ever was - but there's something off about it. Kurogane can't place it, exactly.

Fai orders a coffee, and nothing else. He slides his menu across the table and slips it under Kurogane's, and does not make eye contact with the waiter. And, very pointedly, does not look at Kurogane.

It's well past dusk when they finally leave the cafe, and the snow that had been threatening in the clouds overhead all afternoon seems to start up just as they make their way out onto the street. Fai is still too quiet for Kurogane to feel at ease, but he does offer the princess his outer coat the first time she shivers, his usual tilted smile making an appearance for the first time since they'd entered the cafe as he wraps it securely around her shoulders.

Kurogane hangs back, pacing himself in time with Fai's steps, and watches as Mokona bounces between Syaoran and Sakura ahead of them. Fai's coat trails a bit on the ground behind her, stirring up the thin veil of powdered snow covering the cobblestones.

" Mage," Kurogane begins, "What was that about? In the cafe?"

"Ah, Kuro-rin," Fai's gaze is far-off, unfocused, as he stares down at the snow clinging to his boots, but his voice is lilting and deliberately loud, "I think you're right - that inn we passed when we came into town earlier does seem like a good place to settle in for the night."

Syaoran turns on his heel then, eyes bright, "The one with that historical plaque at the end of the walkway?"

And Kurogane finds himself walking alone behind them, as Fai strides ahead to catch up with the kids, ruffling Syaoran's hair as the boy launches into a long-winded rant about everything he'd noticed when they'd passed that inn earlier.

He takes a deep breath of the cold, early-night air, watching the three of them (and Mokona) smile and carry on as they make their way toward the inn.

*It's none of my business,* Kurogane tells himself .

A gust of chilled wind rolls over them. Fai's step falters just a bit off-kilter, and he accidentally knocks his shoulder into Syaoran's. He plays it off well, with a laugh and an exaggerated shiver that makes Sakura chuckle and pull his coat tighter around herself.

*I'll ask him later,* Kurogane decides .